

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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INFO TREASURY WASHDC

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, EGEN, MX

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO'S STATE OF UNION

MESSAGE: ECONOMIC POLICY ASPECTS

REF: A) MEXICO 14731, B) MEXICO 15159

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. WHILE THE INFORME DID NOT RECEIVE LOUD ACCLAIM OUTSIDE OF POLITICAL CIRCLES, THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S INFORME TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE HAD A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY AND OFFENDED NOBODY. JLP TOUCHED ALL THE BASES AND GAVE LISTENERS AN IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT FOR THE COMING YEAR. THE EMBASSY HAS JUST OBTAINED THE STATISTICAL SUPPLEMENTS AND THE ANNEX WHICH WE UNDERSTAND IS TO BE CONSIDERED PART OF THE INFORME; THESE DOCUMENTS MAY PROVIDE MORE DETAILS OF A NEW ECONOMIC POLICY. THE ORAL PRESENTATION (SUMMARIZED REFTEL A) LEFT NO DOUBT THAT THE FORMER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY WILL BE GRADUALLY PHASED OUT, BUT WITHOUT A SHARP BREAK WITH PAST POLICIES THAT COULD

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AGGRAVATE UNEMPLOYMENT. MAKING CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERED MEXICO TO BE STILL IN A STATE OF CRISIS, AND SHAPRLY CRITICAL OF INFLATION, HE STILL APPEARED ATTRACTED TO ATTACKING THIS PROBLEM FROM THE SUPPLY SIDE. HIS REMARKS ON PUBLIC SECTOR SPENDING WERE INCONCLUSIVE, BUT IT APPEARS PUBLIC SPENDING IN 1977 WILL REACH BUDGETED LEVELS. HIS SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON FUTURE WAGE/INCOME

POLICY CONSISTED MAINLY IN THANKING WORKERS FOR PAST CONSTRAINT AND IN GIVING BUREAUCRATS A 10 PERCENT INCREASE. REFERRING TO THE GRIM ECONOMIC STATE OF COUNTRY WHEN IT WAS HANDED OVER TO HIM 35 WEEKS EARLIER, JLP WAS JUSTIFIABLY PROUD OF THE IMPROVEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. POSSIBLY BECAUSE MEXICO IS STILL "EXPERIENCING A SEVERE CRISIS" OR PERHAPS BECAUSE UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSOR JLP UNDERSTANDS THESE ISSUES, THE INFORME HAD A STRONG EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC POLICY ISSUES. AN ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION MAY LIE IN THE FACT THAT ONLY IN THE PERSON OF THE PRESIDENT DO THE MANY LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC POLICY CONVERGE AND THE PRESIDENT TOOK THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SAY WHAT MINISTERS COULD NOT WITHOUT TREADING ON THEIR COLLEAGUES' TURF. IN HIS INTRODUCTION THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBED THE FORMER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS. HE CALLED THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR OVER-PROTECTED AND SAID THAT WHEN PRIVATE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES BECAME "PRACTICALLY SATURATED", THE GOVERNMENT STEPPED IN WITH INVESTMENTS THAT WERE SOMETIMES POORLY HANDLED. JLP CRITICIZED THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR ITS SPECULATIVE INVESTMENT OR CAPITAL FLIGHT TO A COUNTRY WHERE THEY "STILL ADMIT CAPITAL, BUT NO LONGER ADMIT WORKERS". THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW JIBES AT THE U.S. AND REFLECTS A VIEW EXPRESSED BY SOME MEXICANS THAT THE U.S. IS NOT BEING ENTIRELY FAIR BY PRESSING FOR FREE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MOVEMENT OF CAPITAL WHILE RESTRAINING FREE MOVEMENT OF OTHER FACTORS OF PRODUCTION.

3. JLP, WHILE NOT BLAMING EXTERNAL FACTORS FOR MEXICO'S PROBLEMS, DID ASSOCIATE THESE WITH A CHANGING WORLD ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND USED THIS AS A BASIS FOR SAYING THAT A RETURN TO FORMER POLICIES WAS IMPOSSIBLE, A THEME DEVELOPED IN OTHER SECTIONS OF THE INFORME AS WELL.

4. FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON ADMINISTRATION, JLP MOVED TO PUBLIC SECTOR SPENDING WITH THE COMMENT THAT "THE FINAL OBJECTIVE OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IS GOVERNMENT SPENDING". HE NOTED THAT PLANNING AND BUDGETING WOULD GO HAND-IN-HAND AND SAID WORK HAD BEGUN ON A FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR. (WE HAVE HEARD THAT FIVE-YEAR SECTOR BUDGETS WILL BE ISSUED AT THE TIME OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE 1978 PUBLIC SECTOR BUDGET, PROBABLY IN DECEMBER.) JLP NOTED THAT "WE HAVE BEGUN TO PERMIT CERTAIN INCREASES IN PUBLIC SPENDING, GIVING PRIORITY TO STRATEGIC SECTORS OF OUR ECONOMY THAT INDUCE COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES AND GENERATE INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WHILE POSTPONING OTHER LINES OF ACTIVITY THAT WE CONSIDER

LESS URGENT". THIS REMARK WAS FOLLOWED BY A REFERENCE TO SPENDING THE AMOUNT AUTHORIZED LAST DECEMBER (677 BILLION PESOS). WE PRESUME JLP'S REMARKS TO MEAN THAT HE INTENDS TO SPEND THE AUTHORIZED AMOUNT OF FUNDS, THOUGH WITH SOME INTERNAL SHIFTING. HE DID NOTE THAT (PRESUMABLY PUBLIC) INVESTMENT SPENDING IS NOT NOW AT DESIRED LEVELS, BUT INDICATED CAUTION WAS NEEDED AS SOME INCREASES MIGHT BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. JLP'S REMARKS ON SPENDING SEEM GEARED TOWARD CAUTION, BUT FALL WELL SHORT OF CONFIRMING AN UNDER-SPENDING OF THE 1977 BUDGET.

5. JLP THEN MOVED TO FINANCING IN A GENERAL SENSE. REGARDING PUBLIC SECTOR REVENUE, HE SAID THAT GOM-OWNED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ENTERPRISES WERE BEING REVIEWED WITH AN EYE TO STRENGTHEN-
ING THEIR FINANCIAL STRUCTURES AND ESPECIALLY TO INCREASE
THEIR REVENUES THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE A REFERENCE TO
COMING HIGHER PRICES IN THIS SECTOR. HE ALSO SPOKE OF A
HARMONIZATION OF THE NATIONAL TAX STRUCTURE THAT WOULD
STRENGTHEN FEDERAL-STATE RELATIONS. THIS MAY BE A REFER-
ENCE TO A VALUE-ADDED TAX WHICH MAY BE LEGISLATED LATE

THIS YEAR FOR SUBSEQUENT INTRODUCTION AND WHICH WOULD PROBABLY CONTAIN SOME REVENUE-SHARING ASPECTS. WE UNDERSTAND FINAL DECISION ON VAT HAS NOT YET BEEN TAKEN. JLP NOTED THAT TAX REVENUE HAD EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS. HE ALSO SAID GREATER TAX EQUITY WAS NEEDED, MENTIONING A MORE PROGRESSIVE INCOME TAX SCHEDULE AND CHANGES THAT WOULD DISCOURAGE THE USE OF GOODS "WHICH CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT BE PRODUCED IN MEXICO". THIS WOULD SEEM TO IMPLY THE USE OF HIGHER TAXES TO DISCOURAGE PRODUCTION OF CERTAIN LUXURY ITEMS. WE PRESUME SUCH MEASURES WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY STRICTER MEASURES TO CONTROL SMUGGLING OF THESE GOODS AND PROBABLY HIGHER TARIFFS, ASSUMING LICENSING REQUIREMENTS WERE REMOVED.

6. AMONG OTHER PROSPECTIVE TAX POLICY CHANGES, JLP MENTIONED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MENTIONED PREFERENTIAL TAX TREATMENT FOR REINVESTED PROFITS AND TAX INCENTIVES TO PRODUCERS OF BASIC CONSUMER GOODS. HE IMPLIED THAT THE UNPOPULAR AND COMPLICATED EXCESS PROFITS TAX WILL REMAIN IN SOME FORM.

7. ALSO UNDER THE FINANCING HEADING, JLP TOUCHED ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT, THE EXCHANGE RATE, SILVER COINS AND PETROBONDS. RE THE EXCHANGE RATE, HE SAID THIS IS A "FINANCING INSTRUMENT BUT NEVER A CORNERSTONE OF THE PRODUCTIVE PROCESS, AND EVEN LESS, AS HAPPENED IN RECENT YEARS, THE OBJECTIVE OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM". THESE REMARKS SHOULD PUT TO REST THE RUMORS OF AN IMMINENT RETURN TO A FIXED PARITY. HE CALLED "DOLLARIZATION" ONE OF THE MOST ONERUS PROBLEMS FACING MEXICO IN THAT IT PUTS AN EXCESSIVE BURDEN ON THE INVESTOR, NOT IN REGARD TO THE PRESUMABLY A REFERENCE TO THE EXCHANGE RATE AS HE SUBSEQUENTLY SAID THE BANK OF MEXICO'S BACK-TO-BACK LOANS (MEXICO 15097) WOULD ALLEVIATE THIS PROBLEM. HE ALSO SAID THE IDEA OF A FORWARD MARKET HAD BEEN PUT ASIDE FOR THE TIME BEING.

8. JLP'S REMARKS ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT WERE BRIEF. HE PROMISED FULL RESPECT FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND SAID THAT THE LEGISLATION IN FORCE WOULD NOT CHANGE ADDING THAT MEXICO'S "BASIC THESIS" IS THAT THE HOST COUNTRY HAS THE PREROGATIVE TO DEFINE THE FIELDS OF ACTIVITY FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND TO DICTATE THE FORM IT SHOULD TAKE. THIS OBVIOUSLY MEANS NO RELAXATION OF THE 51 PERCENT MEXICAN OWNERSHIP ON NEW INVESTMENT PROJECTS AND MAY ALSO MEAN THAT JLP HAS DECIDED AGAINST ANY RELAXATION OF THE DUAL TRADEMARK REQUIREMENT, THOUGH WE ARE NOT CERTAIN ON LATTER POINT. JLP JUSTIFIED POLICY ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT BY SAYING THAT THE "CONTINUOUS INCOMING FLOW OF CAPITAL IS

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CONVINCING PROOF" OF ITS ACCEPTANCE. (DIRECT INVESTMENT INFLOWS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1977 WERE SLIGHTLY UNDER YEAR EARLIER LEVELS IN DOLLARS AND WHO CAN SAY WHAT MIGHT BE THE CASE IF THE LAWS HAD BEEN RELAXED?)

9. THE PRESIDENT REVIEWED MEASURES TAKEN THUS FAR TO INCREASE DOMESTIC SAVINGS SUCH AS SILVER COINS, HIGH INTEREST RATES AND PETROBONDS. HE IMPLIED THE LAST-MENTIONED HAD NOT BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS BUT SAID THEY SHOULD BE AS THE PUBLIC BEGINS TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FUNCTION. (COMMENT: THIS IS BY NO MEANS EASY AND THE INTEREST RATE WAS RECENTLY RAISED FROM 7 TO 12 PERCENT IN HOPES OF AIDING THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING). JLP SAID 30,000 OF THE 100 PESO SILVER-CONTENT COINS ARE ISSUED DAILY. THESE ARE BEING HOARDED AS NONE ARE SEEN IN CIRCULATION. SINCE THE SILVER CONTENT IS LESS THAN 100 PESOS, THEY ARE A BIG EARNER FOR THE GOM.

10. THE FIGURE GIVEN FOR INTERNATIONAL RESERVES WAS \$2,936 MILLION AS OF AUGUST 31. THIS INCLUDES UNDEFINED SECONDARY RESERVES OF \$1,141 MILLION WHICH WOULD INCLUDE THE TREASURY AND FED SWAPS OF \$660 MILLION PLUS THE BALANCE OF THEIR EXTENDED FUND FACILITY; PRIMARY RESERVES WERE \$1,795 MILLION, INCLUDING SILVER, GOLD, SDRS, AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE. PUBLIC SECTOR EXTERNAL DEBT AS OF JUNE 30 WAS GIVEN AT \$20,948 MILLION, WHICH IS \$707 MILLION ABOVE THE MARCH 31 FIGURE, AND \$1,238 ABOVE THE END-76 FIGURE.

11. IN HIS COMMENTS ON INDUSTRIAL POLICY, JLP RETURNED O THEMES DEVELOPED EARLIER. WHILE HE DESCRIBED PAST PROTECTIONIST POLICIES AS EXCESSIVE AND INDISCRIMINATE, SAME TIME HE CALLED FOR A NEW CONCEPT THAT WOULD INDUCE VERTICAL INTEGRATION IN INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE, MAKE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES, SATISFY THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE ECONOMY AND MAKE MEXICO LESS DEPENDENT ON OUTSIDE SOURCES.

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JLP SAID THE FIRST STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO REPLACE IMPORT PERMITS WITH TARIFFS, BUT WARNED THAT THIS WOULD NOT MEAN A DISMANTLING OF PROTECTIVE MEASURES, NOR WOULD IT MEAN A NET LOSS OF EITHER PRODUCTION OR JOBS. THIS STANCE RECOGNIZES WIDESPREAD CONCERN OF BUSINESS ABOUT AN ABRUPT POLICY SHIFT AS WELL AS THE CONCERN RE UNEMPLOYMENT. JLP ALSO PROMISED MORE MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE DECENTRALIZATION AND TO BENEFIT SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES, WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED AS OFFERING MORE JOBS PER UNIT OF PRODUCTIVITY THAN DO LARGE FIRMS. (COMMENT: WHILE THE SHIFT FROM IMPORT PERMITS TO TARIFFS IS HEDGED ABOUT WITH ASSURANCES THAT NO ONE WILL BE INJURED AS A RESULT, JLP'S COMMENTS ALSO MAKE CLEAR THAT THE PROPONENTS OF A RATIONALIZATION OF IMPORTS AND DOMESTIC PRODUCTION HAVE FINALLY ACHIEVED THE UPPER HAND. WE SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS YET A LONG ROAD AHEAD, AND THE INFORME ITSELF SOMEWHAT INCONSISTENTLY MENTIONS MEXICO'S CONTINUAL DESIRE TO DECREASE RELIANCE ON IMPORTS OF CAPITAL GOODS AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.

12. JLP CALLED COMMERCE A SERVICE LINKING PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS, WITH THE STATE BEING NOT ONLY A REGULATOR, BUT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALSO A PROMOTER. THE PRESIDENT WARNED THAT ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL PRICES TO BENEFIT CONSUMERS COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY. IN THIS REGARD, HE SAID ONLY THE STATE COULD AFFORD TO ABSORB THE COST OF SUBSIDIES. AFTER NOTING THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF RISING PRICES, HE RETURNED TO HIS ALLIANCE FOR PRODUCTION THEME AND THE NEED TO STIMULATE DOMESTIC PRODUCTION. HE SEEMED TO IMPLY THAT THE PRICE MECHANISM MAY BE THE BEST MEANS TO DO THIS. HE CALLED THE 90 BASIC GOODS PROGRAM LESS THAN SUCCESSFUL AND CALLED FOR A POLICY OF APPROPRIATE PRICES, SALARIES, PROFITS AND FISCAL MEASURES. HE ALSO CALLED FOR A POLICY TO TAKE "INTO ACCOUNT THE NEED ANNUALLY TO UPDATE SALARIES, PARTICULARLY THE MINIMUM WAGE, AND TO

RELATE NEW WAGE LEVELS TO A CLEAR VIEW OF BASIC PRICES ..." HE CALLED FOR A MORE EXPORT-ORIENTED TRADE POLICY, BUT WAS SHORT ON HOW TO ACHIEVE THIS, MENTIONING ONLY RAW MATERIALS, GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, RELATIVE DEVELOPMENT LEVEL AND "SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ECONOMY".

13. WE NOTED IN REFTTEL THAT PRESIDENT GRANTED 10 PERCENT WAGE INCREASE FOR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WORKERS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES. APPARENTLY THERE WILL ALSO BE SELECTIVE WAGE INCREASES FOR THESE GROUPS. WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE EXACTLY HOW WIDESPREAD THESE INCREASES WILL BE.

14. IN A LENGTHY SUMMARY AT THE CONCLUSION, JLP RETURNED TO ECONOMIC THEMES. HE HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPROVEMENT IN ECONOMIC INDICATORS SINCE NOVEMBER 19, 1976, THE DATE HE CALLED HEIGHT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. HE SAID THAT ECONOMIC GROWTH IN 1977 WILL NOT REACH 3 PERCENT, CALLING THIS THE SECOND YEAR OF RECESSION AND INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT WHICH, HE SAID, MAY WORSEN AS A RESULT OF "POLICIES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ADOPTED AGAINST OUR BRACEROS." "WE MUST BE FULLY PREPARED FOR THAT CONTINGENCY", HE ADDED WITHOUT CLARIFICATION.

15. THE PRESIDENT RETURNED ONCE MORE TO HIS ALLIANCE FOR PRODUCTION, CALLING IT THE MEXICAN SOLUTION TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. HE SAID THAT IF INFLATION COULD NOT BE OVERCOME ON THE SUPPLY SIDE, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO EMPLOY A WORSE SOLUTION; A REDUCTION IN DEMAND. HE REJECTED THIS BY SAYING THAT IN AN ECONOMY SUCH AS MEXICO'S, IT WOULD BE A BREACH OF FAITH TO REDUCE DEMAND AS THE PRESENT LEVEL IS NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL. THE PRESIDENT'S ELOQUENT CONCLUDING REMARKS OBVIOUSLY WENT BEYOND ECONOMIC POLICY. YET HE PUT SUCH EMPHASIS ON HIS ALLIANCE FOR PRODUCTION THAT IT IS WORTH NOTING HIS CONCLUDING WORDS DESCRIBING HIS PROGRAM. "THE ALLIANCE PROGRAM CALLS FOR THE JOINT, CONSCIENTIOUS, RESPONSIBLE AND DETERMINED COLLABORATION OF EVERY LAST ONE OF THE MEXICAN PEOPLE. IT MEANS POOLING THE ASPIRATIONS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS IN ORDER TO HARMONIZE IDENTICAL OBJECTIVES, TO FULFILL THE NEEDS OF THE MAJORITY SECTORS OF THE POPULATION, TO ELIMINATE LUXURY GOODS, TO ENCOURAGE THE HIGH-INCOME CLASSES TO INVEST MORE AND SPEND LESS, AND TO RATIONALIZE MANUFACTURING AND MARKETING PROCESSES. IT IS A FORM OF CONCERTED ACTION THAT PURSUES THE COUNTRY'S BALANCED AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT." THOMPSON

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